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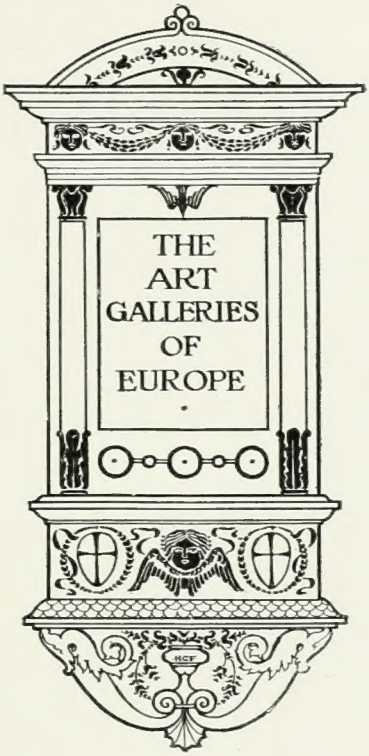

THE NATIONAL GALLERY
LONDON
THE EARLY BRITISH SCHOOL

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, P.R.A. PHOTO. HANFSTAENGL.

LORD HEATHFIELD WITH THE KEY OF THE FORTRESS OF GIBRALTAR

THE NATIONAL GALLERY · LONDON

THE EARLY BRITISH SCHOOL

LONDON · GEORGE NEWNES · LIMITED ·
SOUTHAMPTON STREET · STRAND · W·C
NEW YORK · FREDK·WARNE & CO·36 EAST 22nd ST·

839 31

THE BALLANTYNE PRESS
TAVISTOCK ST. LONDON

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THE NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON

EARLY BRITISH SCHOOL

BY ROBERT DE LA SIZERANNE

THE foreigner who has just set foot in England and who visits the rooms of the British School, either at the National Gallery or at the Tate Gallery, will for a second time experience the sensation of landing in an island. What magnificent indifference toward the rest of the artistic world, and what "splendid isolation!" He finds himself in presence of an art which attaches itself in no way to the art of the Continent; or at least is only attached to it subterraneously and obscurely, as is every island to a continent, as every individual human being is to humanity in general. "No doubt," the stranger will say to himself, "similar needs and aspirations must have led the inhabitants of this island to discoveries of form and colour, of gesture and expression, of signs and symbols, comparable to the discoveries of those who inhabit the Continent." And such in fact is the case. But it appears to have come about by an independent though parallel process—by spontaneous generation, as it were; and the stranger will be inclined to marvel that the inhabitants of this island, left to their own resources, should have achieved the fabrication of such perfect pictures of life. Indeed, Cook was no more astonished at beholding the carvings with which the Tahitians decorated their ceremonial axes, than the foreigner will be when he pursues his explorations as far as the eastern end of the National Gallery, and suddenly finds himself face to face with Turner. If in the streets of London, or upon English country roads, he had forgotten that continental world of classical Europe which is the child of Greece, he here suddenly realises that he is henceforward separated therefrom, perhaps never to return.

Such are the impressions of a stranger sensitive to the suggestions of Art, though ignorant of its history. But if, instead of being ignorant, this visitor to the National Gallery has some acquaintance with the history of English art, his astonishment will not be the less. On the contrary, it will be augmented. The more he knows, the less he will understand. For if the English had lived and developed outside the rest of the world, like the Tahitians or the Fuegians, it would have been a fine thing for them to have created such an art, but no one would then have been surprised at this art's being so peculiarly their own. But though, as is the fact, they never were reduced to their own resources; though they knew how to profit, like all other Europeans, by the triumphs of Italian, Flemish, and Dutch art; though it is incontestable, if paradoxical, that the distance is less between Great Britain and the Continent than between the Continent and Great Britain, (that is to say, that the English were always more willing to observe others than others were to learn from them); and even though English artists had seen at work before their very eyes two masters from the Continent who were incomparable in the art of portraiture—Holbein and Van Dyck—and a third very capable artist, Antonio Moro, besides, later, that admirable landscapist Canaletto: remembering all this, it becomes positively incomprehensible how the painters of this country can have managed to produce, from the eighteenth century onward, an art consistently independent of those foreign masters, distinctly insular, aggressively original. Yet there is the fact. If we go from the National Gallery to the Tate Gallery, that is to say, from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century; if we pass from anecdotal painting to landscape, and from allegory to portraiture—it is England, always England, that we see in each canvas, as well separated by its gilt frame and sheet of glass from continental painting as England is separated from the Continent by the sea. Furthermore, far from their having imitated foreign schools or borrowed from them, these English painters have in their isolation attained such creative power, that on beholding their work we find the germ of many modern schools, even that of our latest continental talents. We discover whence springs the pseudo-originality of this or that French, German, Italian, or Swiss artist. On visiting these rooms for the first time the Continental artist experiences confused sensations, not all of them entirely agreeable. He expected to meet with debtors, and finds himself surrounded by creditors.

Delacroix, when as a young man he first came in contact with the British School, felt this; and in 1858, in a letter to Th. Silvestre, he recognises it very explicitly. "That admirable man Constable," he says, "is one of the glories of England. I have already spoken to you of the impression which he produced on me at the time when I was painting the *Massacre de Scio*. He and Turner are true reformers: they have forsaken the groove of the old landscapists. Our school, which now possesses many men of talent in this genre, has largely profited by their

example. Géricault returned quite overcome by one of the great landscapes he had sent us." The painter of the *Naufrage de la Méduse* had in fact received something like a shock the first time he set foot in England, and his disturbance had been profound. In a letter dated from London in 1821, he wrote to Horace Vernet: "I said to my father a few days ago that only one thing was lacking to your talent, and that was, to be steeped in the English School; and I repeat this because I know that you appreciate the little you have seen of it. The exhibition which has just opened convinces me more than ever that here alone are colour and effect recognised and felt. You can form no idea of this year's fine portraits, of a great number of the landscapes and genre pictures, of the animals painted by Ward, and by Landseer—aged only eighteen. The masters never produced anything better in this line. We need not blush at going back to school." And thirty-seven years afterwards Delacroix advocated the same source of inspiration for continental art: "Our school greatly needs an infusion of new blood. Our school is old, and it seems that the English school is young. They appear to seek the natural; and we do nothing but imitate pictures." Thus the first impression made upon these two great painters—who were both of them also great intellectually—by that art reproductions of which are here set before the eyes of my readers, was not only that this art owed nothing to any one; but that even those who came from the classic lands of high art and of beauty might borrow something from it without shame.

This is the striking characteristic of the British School as seen at the National Gallery. This it is which distinguishes the rooms devoted to that School from all the other neighbouring rooms, rich and precious as are their contents. For, after all, a visit to Bruges might take the place of a visit to Room XI.—even remembering the wonderful Arnolfini couple, whose little mirror has preserved its reflection for five hundred years. And when one has passed several mornings at Florence, one could, if necessary, dispense with visiting the Tuscan rooms at Trafalgar Square. But where in Europe could we find a substitute for a visit to those rooms which contain the Reynoldses, the Gainsboroughs, the Hogarths, the Romneys, the Constables and the Turners? And if I begin by defining the general impression of a foreigner face to face, not with this or that picture, but with the whole collection of these English masters, it is firstly because a foreigner perceives better than a native what may be called the main geographical outlines of a country, of a town, of an art, of a face; and it is, further, in order to justify the words written at the head of this article: "The British School."

It has often been said that there is no "British School." What is meant by that I confess I do not at all understand. If it implies that there has never been in England, as in Italy, in Flanders, and even in France at certain periods, any great manufactories of painting, where the master indicated the general scheme of a picture, and his disciples carried out the execution, either under the name of the master which

was the name of the firm, as it were, or, when they had left him, under their own names—if it implies this, then it is true, and we can but be glad of it. Again, if it is meant that the English painter usually made a shorter stay in his master's studio than did his Italian or French brother in art, this too is true, and the result has been on the whole neither better nor worse. But is this really what in the language of art is termed a "School"? "To found a school," when a master is in question, means that he so impresses his personality on the minds and work of his contemporaries that they seem unable to exist without him. "To be of a school" has always meant to be inspired by the point of view or the technique of a master to such a degree that there is a kind of paternal relation between the art of the master and that of the disciples, and of consanguinity between the talents of the disciples themselves.

In its strict sense the word "school" evidently does not apply to such powerful and original temperaments as those of the great English artists. But to what *great* continental artists does it apply? This definition is, in every country, made for second-rate artists only.

As for the "masters," wherever you find them, each of them possesses a personality which forbids his being called "disciple." In whatever period we choose to observe them, we shall not find them in any way less independent one of another on the Continent than in England. In the eighteenth century Watteau, Chardin, and Boucher differed among themselves quite as much as Reynolds, Romney, and Gainsborough. In the nineteenth Delacroix, Ingres, and Fromentin differ as much as Wilkie, Leslie, and Landseer. And finally in our own days no greater difference has been found between the art of Millais, Walker, and Burne-Jones, than between that of Puvis de Chavannes, Bernard, and Bonnat. If from these masters we descend to lesser personalities, we shall no doubt find in France painters of some talent enrolled under such and such a banner, and faithfully hoisting its colours. But shall we not find the same in England? Were not the contemporaries of Lawrence—men like Owen, Sir Martin Archer Shee, Philipps, Jackson, Harlow, Gordon, and Briggs—subject more or less to the haunting influence of Reynolds? And if we pass to the landscapists, we do not perceive them to be much more governed and disciplined by the same formulas in France than in England. Certainly Turner, Constable, Callcott, and Collins differ greatly. But do we find that Corot, Rousseau, Courbet, and Chintreuil resemble each other? Which brings us back to our point that only mediocre artists can be attached to a "school," and that the true creators, of whatever country, can never be so bound down. But if by "school" is meant a collection of distinctive common traits, of similar characteristics, which through all diversities of talent, and even of genius, can be traced to the common race and kindred soil whence they sprang, then who can deny that there is a "British School"? It is perhaps, of all the schools of painting which flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the one which is most quickly and easily recognised amidst all the others.

detaching itself the most clearly from the whole body of European pictorial art. Is there any lover of art, for instance, who on entering a gallery where an English picture hangs among other eighteenth-century canvases, will not say, "Look, there is an English portrait!" He may not at first distinguish whether it is a Reynolds, a Gainsborough, a Romney, a Hoppner, a Raeburn; he may perhaps confound a work due to one of those masters with a Lawrence. But he will unhesitatingly recognise the family resemblance, or, as one might say (and I am going to show why), the trade-mark, the "Made in England," and he would never have mistaken it for a portrait by Nattier, Van Loo, Boucher, or Troy. The case is the same with genre pictures, animal groups, farmyard or cottage scenes, and pictures of child-life. From the last third of the eighteenth century to the second third of the nineteenth, and even later, these subjects treated by an English master reveal their British origin at the first glance.

Doubtless those who are more deeply versed in the knowledge of the different masters are more conscious of the particular differences which separate them than of the common traits which unite them. What strikes one first of all, however, in a portrait by Opie, Beechey, Romney, Raeburn, and Hoppner, is not that it is a Romney, an Opie, or a Raeburn, but that it is British.

In landscape this impression is least strong. With the exception of Turner, who is severed by a great gulf from schools of every kind, English landscapists do not sufficiently differ from Continental (from the French, for instance), for us to be able to speak of an "English landscape." Before the paintings of Constable, Old Crome, Bonington, Collins, Callcott or Richard Wilson, one feels still on the Continent. But why is this so? Because the Continent imitated these masters, and managed, it must be admitted, if not to surpass, at least to equal them. This does not prevent there having been a "British School" even in landscape. Only this English School was so powerful that it created a French School like unto itself, and nowadays it is not very easy to distinguish between them. It would have been quite easy in former days, from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth: for in France there was then nothing resembling the English way of looking at Nature. When that view of Nature first came into being, when he who was afterwards to be called "Old Crome," was trotting about the streets of Norwich carrying Dr. Rigby's medicaments to his patients: when, later, Constable escaped from his father's mill on the banks of the Stour with the intention of painting it instead of working it: when Collins, burning with admiration for Morland, obtained an introduction to that Bohemian painter and found him lying dead-drunk in his father's kitchen: in a word, during the boyhood of those three great landscape-painters, who was there in France, or anywhere else on the Continent, who could paint as they were going to paint, who saw Nature as they were going to see her? They were all of them innovators, and all in exactly the same sense

They each of them—and with them Turner, Richard Wilson, and Callcott himself—abandoned the composed, artificial, historical landscape, the anonymous tree, the sombre foreground serving to throw back the rest of the picture, while, face to face with Nature, they strove to render their personal and spontaneous impressions. "What! do you not know yet, at your age, that you ought to paint your impressions?" said Turner to one of his brother-artists; thus giving expression to the word of command for all the masters of his country who had preceded him, as well as for those who were to follow. This passion for simple nature, this independence of all those vain formulas which once claimed to embellish her, is the common trait which unites Turner and Constable, Bonington and Collins, Old Crome and Morland. No doubt they differ profoundly each from the other. But does not Corot differ absolutely from Marilhat, Cazin from Rousseau, Courbet from Huet or Paul Flandrin? If, however, we speak of the "French School of landscape," when those who compose that "school" are so widely separated one from another, and achieve such different results, I do not know why we should refrain from saying "the British School." But indeed the word "School" is an improper one in both cases. There is something which can be called "modern landscape," in very clear and evident contradistinction from Italo-French classical landscape on the one hand and from Dutch landscape on the other. Now this modern landscape, virtually the same today in every European country, has it is true been brought to a rare degree of perfection in France by the painters of Barbizon and Ville d'Avray; but it was created, at one sudden stroke and fully fledged, in England, and it is here in the National Gallery that you may see its first and most puissant manifestations.

Thus, then, the originality of the British School, clearly apparent in the case of portraits, and evident in genre scenes or animal paintings, is no less actual in the case of landscape; and this is what strikes visitors to the National Gallery before anything else. The isolation of this School, its disdain of the discoveries and experiences of all Continental Schools, are what arrest his attention.

In vain will the stranger be referred to history, and to the travels of all these painters: he may be told how well Reynolds knew the rooms decorated by Raphael, and how he copied the Venetians in their own country; how Romney paid long visits to Italy; how Benjamin West, Barry and Copley, Etty, Wilson, and many others, made the journey to Florence and Rome as did French artists of the same period; how Callcott visited Holland and Paris. The visitor will feel, despite every proof to the contrary, that these islanders never quitted their own country. And he will be in the right. He will have realised instinctively that these journeyings were no pilgrimages to the holy places whither the heart precedes the feet, and where the heart abides when the feet have taken their departure. For Hogarth laughed before Raphael! And if the others did not commit that sacrilege, while some even made vague polite

speeches about the "Stanze," yet the marbles of Rome caused none of them to forget the little thatched cottage, nor did the Tiber's shores efface the memory of the banks of Stour and Avon. The attitude of the whole British School towards the Continent resembles that of Lawrence's father, who replied to the Duke of Devonshire's offer of £80 to send the little prodigy to Rome, that "his son's talent required no cultivation"; and it may be said of even the most respectful of these English travellers in Italy, as Hogarth said of himself, that "he was so profane as to admire Nature more than the finest production of Art." The English masters of the eighteenth century were, indeed, acquainted with Latin art; but they brought no Latin influence back with them to England. They saw Italy, they saw France; they examined the methods employed there. But they disdained the results. They borrowed certain methods of painting, but not the inspiration of the classical masters. They passed through the museums, the galleries, and the churches of the Continent, silent, unfathomable, their eyes half-closed, as the Japanese pass through Europe: *to take arms from it, but not a flag.*

What is their flag, then? That is to say, what is the particular sign to which these English masters rally? What are the elements of their originality, and what are the characteristics of their profession? We shall find these very marked; as marked in their school as anywhere else—perhaps even more so than anywhere else, if we consider their principal works with respect to *composition, gesture, lighting, and colour.*

First, composition. There is an essentially English composition. More than once in the history of famous English pictures this kind of thing has happened: a dealer, desirous of turning some work of art to the best possible account, cuts the picture in two, thus making it into two perfectly distinct scenes, each complete in itself, and sells them separately without any one perceiving anything lacking in either. It is a fortunate chance if some enlightened or lucky collector happens to buy the two canvases, and re-unite what the speculator has divided! That has been the history of numerous English pictures, from the *Mouschold Heath* of Old Crome, to the *Hadrian in England* of Alma Tadema. It might be the history of nearly all! For this proceeding is not merely a proof of the dealers' mercantile ingenuity: it also proves the absence of unity and the dispersion of effect which reign in each of these pictures. Can you imagine that one could cut in half the *Rinaldo and Armida* of Van Dyck, or the *Bacchus and Ariadne* of Titian? No. This is a characteristic quite peculiar to pictures of the English School. Whenever they comprise a great number of figures there are nearly always several groups equal in importance, each complete in itself and capable of being separated from the rest without damage. There are two compositions, sometimes three, each possessing its right, its left, and its centre or base. It is like a stage-play, a tragedy or a comedy, where throughout the piece two plots pursue one another, either of which might have begun, developed, and finished independently of the other without any one observing it. Look at the

second picture of the *Marriage à la Mode : Shortly after Marriage*. If you continue the line of the second pillar with a Doric capital upwards and downwards as far as the frame, you divide the picture into two portions, each possessing its own pictorial unity : one might be called *The Chimneypiece*, and the other *The Gallery*. There is no doubt a psychological relation between the two. The despair of the steward who is going away with his bills unpaid is only explained by the dazed condition in which he has found his master, stranded in his armchair after a long night of debauch. But there is no pictorial relation. The eye has two nearly equal centres of attraction ; for the lesser, that of the steward, claims and retains the attention on account of the depth of the gallery. It is impossible to embrace the whole scene at a single glance, and each of the two episodes satisfies the eye completely. So, too, with the *Death of the Countess*. If you suppress either half of the scene by applying a sheet of paper along a vertical line indicated by the weight of the clock, you will find that each half is self-sufficient. On the one side you will have a woman expiring in an armchair, while an old nurse is holding her child for her to kiss ; on the other you have a master-apothecary rebuking his servant by pointing to a phial that has fallen to the ground, while a dog all skin and bone profits by the state of general emotion to clamber on the table and possess himself of a calf's-head which is awaiting the expected guests. It is not only because the separation is *possible* that there is duality in composition here : it is *fatal ;* because the two scenes are both of them complete, and nothing relates them *pictorially* to each other. It is also very difficult to understand the lighting. It comes entirely from the side opposite the open window, so that as regards the group of the Countess there is no need for us to see the window ; it forms a complete, homogeneous, and dramatic whole. The other group in no way leads the eye towards the first ; for when there is a bright *hole* in a picture, like this open window with its distant horizon, the glance passes naturally through the window and away into the distance, instead of falling upon a corner of the picture.

Now look at the *Death of Major Peirson*, by Copley, and imagine that a perpendicular line, descending from the pilaster in the middle of the little cupola above the smoke, and passing through the point of the flagstaff, divides the scene into two unequal portions ; these two portions form two complete pictures. On the left you have the group of women and children in flight, and behind them your eye will perceive a distant prospect on which it may rest. On the right you have two large groups, the more important containing the body of the hero in the centre. The same thing is visible even in the *Death of the Earl of Chatham*, although it is less apparent. This picture comprises two quite distinct groups : that of the lords who surround the great statesman ; and that of the other spectators, who are turning their heads towards the main subject of the work. One group acts ; the other looks on. The psychological unity is perfect, because, psychologically, the attitudes of the second

group cannot be understood if the first is not seen: but even from this point of view the first is complete in itself, and if one intersects the canvas by a vertical line descending from the angle of the cornice, all the right-hand portion forms a picture psychologically complete. At all events, if there is psychological unity, there is no pictorial unity. The second group—that on the left, surmounted by the daïs—is a whole pictorially complete, with its right, its left, its centre, its dark foreground throwing into relief the strongly lighted second plane, and its background. Furthermore, its composition is exactly like that of the first; its masses of light and shade are opposed in the same way. A *hole* is formed, and through this aperture the glance passes, arrested by the table loaded with papers, and resting on the figures which surround it, instead of going straight towards Pitt. You do not indeed find this arrangement in Fuseli, but can that Swiss painter be called a typical representative of English composition? Neither do you find it in Stothard, nor in Etty; they have other national characteristics without possessing this one. But we shall find it later when we come to examine more modern masters and contemporaries: in Egg, in Maclise, in Wilkie, in Mulready, in Ward, in Webster, in Walker; and finally, systematised to the highest degree, in Orchardson.

In the case of landscapes there is often a tall division in the middle—a tree or a wall—and on each side two depressions like two lunettes which lead the eye to two quite distinct horizons. This is very striking in Turner's *Apuleia in Search of Apuleius*, where there are two different landscapes with nothing to unite them. So, too, in Callcott's *Entrance to Pisa*, a perpendicular line descending from the ridge of the roof of the tallest house divides the picture into two landscapes—one taller than its width, and the other wider than its height. So, again, Constable's *Flatford Mill* (and it is an exception with this painter) shows us two pictures: one on the left with the canal and the road; the other on the right with the brook, the trees, and the meadow. In Gainsborough's *Landscape* our attention is divided between two subjects of interest: the road and the brook. The former is the more important; but the second likewise forms a whole which seizes the eye and leads it far from the principal scene.

In preference to the pyramidal form of composition, which collects all the interest in the middle and rather high up, and may be called the composition in A; in preference also to the composition in V, which likewise collects all the interest in the centre, but rather low down; Englishmen more often use what may be called the arrangement in W, creating two centres of interest towards which the eye is led by two similar lunettes, and thus effectually preventing the eye from taking in the whole at a single glance: a divergent kind of composition which seems made for squinters, and is very markedly characteristic of the English School. Even in Turner's admirably composed *Fighting Temeraire*, where it would be a crime to alter anything, there are two similar motives of interest on

the right and left of the picture : the sun which is about to disappear, and the vessel which is going to its death. And the pictorial interest is obtained in each case by exactly the same opposition of light and shade. The dark buoy on the right plays exactly the same part in relation to the luminous reflection of the sun, which on the left is played by the tug in relation to the illumined hull of the *Temeraire ;* and the smoke of the tug above this illumined hull plays the same part as the sombre cloud above the disk of the setting sun. The two portions of the picture are equal in pictorial interest : each might be seen without the other ; and, from the dramatic point of view, there is a no less profound sadness in the spectacle of the expiring day than in that of the old combatant, the victor of Trafalgar, going towards annihilation and oblivion amid the obscurity of humble domestic uses.

The second characteristic of the British School is *gesture.* Of course this is not perceivable in the first pictures painted in England—in those portraits by foreigners (sometimes naturalised), or in the mere imitations produced by their immediate pupils. The portrait of Edmund Butts by John Betts is a quasi-Holbein, and that of Endymion Porter by William Dobson is a sham Van Dyck. Indeed it has less the look of a Van Dyck than of a Hyacinthe Rigaud, a Largillière, or a Mignard. It is difficult to imagine anything more pompous than the principal figure, or more awkward than the subordinate figures. No one is looking where he ought to look. The bust itself, instead of keeping quiet, is looking away out of the picture. The expression of the dog is alone natural. As for Porter himself, the " King of Prophets," as Herrick called him, enthroned amidst rich heavy draperies, an antique Roman bust, a tree which looks as if it had been painted in a landscape, and a marble bas-relief, holding an enormous damascened gun, he looks like nothing but the proprietor of an old curiosity shop. Again, there is nothing individual either in gesture or expression in the *Portrait of a Girl,* by Peter Lely—who, moreover, was a Dutchman, his real name being Van der Vaes. The object of the girl's gesture with her right hand is not to feed the parrot, but to show the palm of her hand ; that of her left is to show the back of her other hand, and also to raise her skirt so as to reveal her pretty foot. The curtain is lifted, not by a gust of wind, but obviously by the artist ; and its laboriously fashioned folds seem to be kept in place by pins. It is a portrait which poses, without the slightest dissimulation. So, again, with Hudson, the master of Reynolds, one of whose works is exhibited here, a portrait of the marine painter Samuel Scott ; there is nothing distinctively English about the gesture. We have now arrived at the middle of the eighteenth century ; English art is already born, and the English gesture already exists. It is not however, to be sought for in the works of the serious painters, but in those of a quasi-caricaturist —Hogarth.

Hogarth has great faults as a painter. Charles Lamb's remark that " other pictures we look at—his we read," is perfectly just, and is his

condemnation. He gives us too much to decipher. His *Duel* is the only scene in the *Marriage à la Mode* which does not contain a conundrum. In *The Death of the Countess* the dog, the stolen ring, the newspaper on the ground with the gallows, the bottle, the label on the bottle in the doctor's pocket, are so many hieroglyphs which count for nothing in pictorial interest, but go far to swamp it in the dramatic point of view. In *Shortly after Marriage* the gaming-tables, the cards littering the floor, the musical instruments, the burnt-out candles, the account-books in the arms of the steward, the pen behind his ear, and the bills in his hand, tell us about a multitude of things wherein neither correctness of form nor brilliance of colour are of any consequence. All this is very ingenious, very complete, very telling. It is even too much so; for it is disagreeable, it is provoking, to find everything written down for one when one is seeking a sensation—that is to say, something that is not grasped intellectually, but is experienced. A picture by Hogarth is like a forest where the trees are hidden behind placards. Hogarth leaves nothing for the imagination to do. His pictures do not *suggest* a drama: they point it out. There is a thousand times more feeling, more drama, more humanity, in some enigmatical figures by Watts or Burne-Jones. No doubt they are as far removed from the true function of a work of plastic art as are the figures of Hogarth; but a riddle is worth more than mere chatter.

However, Hogarth is a great master; and if he is so, he owes it to his *gesture*. This is always perfectly natural; it expresses the human machine with a precision, and above all with a variety, which before Hogarth's advent had been little known. Look at the dejection of the young earl in *Shortly after Marriage*, the thrusting of his hands into his pockets, the relaxation of his extended legs. Look at the Countess's feet in the *Death of the Countess*, and compare this relaxation, produced by the contraction of death, with the former very different relaxation. Again, observe the heavy steps of the steward in the first picture; and in the second, the trembling knees of the doctor's boy and the position of his feet. Pursue this method of examination with all Hogarth's pictures, and you will be astonished to see how the movement of the feet is everywhere precisely and expressly ordained by the general attitude of the body; so that we might divine the expressions on the faces of his characters if we had nothing before our eyes but the buckles of their shoes! Now this characteristic, perceived for the first time in the case of Hogarth, will be found thenceforward in the whole English School. If we except Stothard, and later, Etty, whose attitudes are governed less by their signification than by their myological grace, all English pictures are recognisable by perfect correctness of gesture and absolute simplicity of attitude. None of them look as if they had been prepared by the painter or sought for by the model. This is most apparent in the case of portraiture. Whether active or at rest, the sitter has always the air of having been surprised by the painter: surprised at the moment

when he laid down his spectacles on his paper in order to look at or speak to you, as in Lawrence's *Julius Angerstein;* or when he raised his head from his Bible to look towards the sunlight and listen to "his daughter's voice," like the parish clerk *Orpin*, by Gainsborough; or when looking at you, like Opie's *Mrs. Godwin;* or like Romney's *Lord Heathfield*, at the moment when he is striking the palm of his left hand with the great key chained to his right, as if to say, by this good-humoured and familiar action, "They shall not have it!" Or, finally, surprised when, seated with pendent legs and fishing-rod between his knees, he pauses in the arrested gesture of adjusting his hook, as in Raeburn's *Colonel Bryce MacMurdo*. But it is in portraits of women and children that the gesture is supremely excellent. The English alone, at the period to which we refer, had the audacity and the good fortune to seize and portray such bits of life as Reynolds's portrait of *Mrs. Hartley and her Child*, *Robinetta*, and *The Infant Samuel*, Lawrence's *Nature*, and Romney's *Lady Hamilton as a Bacchante*. And even much later than this, when a certain amount of freedom had made its ways into the pose and gesture of continental pictures, who but an Englishman would have dared—as Lawrence did in the portrait of *Lady Mary Wellesley with her two Sisters*—to place a young woman's foot in her hand? English gesture may everywhere be recognised by its ease and naturalness, in contrast with the portraits of other countries. When the figure is without gesture, it is at least without affectation. In English portraits of the eighteenth century the model is either really doing something, or thinking of something, or looking at something. In French portraits of the same period the models *pose*, and do not really act or pay any attention to their action. They may hold a netting-needle, but they do not net; or the bow of a violoncello, but do not play; or the crook of a shepherd or shepherdess, but they do not look at their flocks. Moreover, they look at nothing and seem to think of nothing. Their gaze is not fixed upon you with any intensity either of curiosity, or of passion, or even of life. They seem lost in inward contemplation. Here in England the case is quite otherwise. Every gesture expresses a feeling or fulfils a purpose. The absence of gesture leaves the body in an attitude of real repose, of true relaxation; as in Raeburn's *Mrs. Lauzun*, or Hoppner's *Countess of Oxford*. It exerts itself for a practical end, or relaxes completely for repose—which is likewise an end; what it never does is to relax or exert itself simply to charm the eye of the spectator. There is no ostentatious attitudinising—*ad pompam et ostentationem*—in an English portrait: we no more feel the search after a "noble" attitude, than after a "noble" subject or "noble" composition. We can already see the dawn of those two characteristics which were one day to affect the modern spirit so powerfully: correctness of gesture, and accent.

The *accent* is, in fact, the third characteristic of the English School, and particularly of its portraiture. It is partly due to the special method of lighting which the British masters have always chosen for their figures:

and as this lighting is very arbitrary, it absolutely disproves the assertion that among those masters there is no common tradition, no stamp of a method, no similarity of procedure. For it would not be easy to find in any other school of the same period as constant a use of the same procedure as we find in the English method of *lighting*. Take any portrait you like in the National Gallery : look at Romney's *The Parson's Daughter*, Raeburn's *Mrs. Lauzun*, Gainsborough's *Orpin*, or his *Sir Henry Bate Dudley ;* or take Beechey's *Johnston*, or Opie's *Mrs. Godwin*, and add to them Lawrence's *Mrs. Siddons*, and his *Child with a Kid*, as well as his *Angerstein*. Then compare with all these portraits Raeburn's *Colonel Mac Murdo*, and Reynolds's *Dr. Samuel Johnson*, or his portrait of himself. Finally, to convince you that this is indeed a tradition, and the characteristic of a school, look for the *Portraits of Hogarth's Servants*, painted long before any of those I have just cited. You will find them all lighted in the same manner.

This manner of lighting is very rarely found in Nature. In order that a face fully illuminated, as every face is here, should have that sharply defined shadow under the nose, those dark pronounced hollows under the eyebrows, and that emphatic line of shade under the lower lip, while all the rest—arms, knees, draperies, background, and surroundings—is plunged in half shadow, very special circumstances are requisite. There must be a narrow shaft of light beating down upon the top of the head, the forehead, and the apex of the chest, remaining concentrated there without illuminating anything more around them. Now this is possible, but it is only possible when this shaft of light is composed of parallel, or almost parallel, rays, not diverging one from the other nor diffusing themselves over all the scene to be painted. Now all natural lights are diffuse : all natural rays are divergent. It is, therefore, a studio-light which illuminates all these portraits : furthermore it is not the usual studio-light, for that *is* diffuse. It is very difficult, even in a studio, to obtain an illumination by parallel rays. In order thus to see all the people whose portraits they paint, the artists of any country must be very singularly favoured by chance. It is simpler to believe that we have here a studio-recipe, which found favour in their eyes and has been carefully followed.

And why did they follow it ? Because it provided them with the desired *accent*. By "accent" is meant the immediate opposition of the deepest dark to the highest light : for instance, the buoy on the right in Turner's *Fighting Temeraire*. Romney's *Parson's Daughter* is thus painted entirely in accents. *Accent* is the contrary to the *parti-pris : i.e.*, to that convention which puts all one side of a figure in shadow, all the other side in the light, and joins the two by insensible gradations only. Of course the *parti-pris* existed in the eighteenth century—in the landscapes of Gainsborough, for example. There is, however, a constant tendency in the British School to abandon the effects obtained by great opposing masses, and to substitute livelier and more telling effects due to the

opposition of details in the very centre, even, of the picture. This is the reason why in English portraits the nostrils cast a short, abrupt, well-defined shadow, which is a kind of distinguishing mark not found elsewhere in the same degree of intensity.

This distinguishing mark is associated with another: namely, the extraordinary brilliance of the lips and eyes. These shine out from the canvas like ripe fruits, like half-opened pomegranates; they are radiant as rubies and topazes against the whiteness of the skin. The lines of Victor Hugo:

"Ce n'est pas de la flamme au creux des jeunes gens,
Mais dans l'œil du crétin on voit de la lumière!"

were never more applicable than to those, young and old, who had the good fortune to sit to the English masters. This is due chiefly to their method of lighting, which emphasised the eyes and mouth; but also to their bold use of colours, sometimes fugitive; and lastly, to their extraordinary freedom of execution. These masters of the eighteenth century—and with them Lawrence—attempted absolutely nothing that was beyond their means of attainment. Unlike their Continental brethren, they did not exhaust themselves over grand scenes difficult to render harmonious; they scarcely ever ventured beyond a head, and when they had added two arms they considered that they had made an extensive journey into the unknown regions of Art and Life. In short they followed to the letter the counsel of La Fontaine:

"Ne forçons pas notre talent,
Nous ne ferons rien avec grâce."

and set themselves to know exactly *quid recusant, quid valeant humeri*, according to Horace's advice. They always worked *within the limits of their capacity*. Let us keep this well in mind, for in it we shall find the principal difference between these English masters of the Early School—that is, of the eighteenth, and beginning of the nineteenth, centuries—and their successors of the present day.

One man alone did not always work within the limits of his capacity, and this was Turner. But Turner no more belonged to the Early School than to the Modern School. The man who started when young from the land of Claude Lorraine, and who when old came to shore in the country of Claude Monet, the artist whose work summarises the labour of two centuries, can no more be "placed" in any period or any school than a comet can be assigned to any quarter of the heavens. His uninterrupted exertions from 1795 to 1851 make him at once the ancestor and the contemporary of nineteenth-century painters. Let us consider him for a moment therefore, before passing on to the Modern School; for we shall find in him a new characteristic of English Art: the poeticisation of Nature through suggestion.

We have beheld in Constable the man of trees, of running water, of deeply-buried country roads, of cottages and cornfields: of things tangible, solid, sane, and wholesome, which to those who have known them from infancy are like the very face of their fatherland. We have seen these expressed in their solid reality, in their external completeness, signifying nothing beyond themselves, and leading the imagination no further than the mill, the church tower, or the hills that close in the horizon. With Turner we see something else, and above all we divine a thousand other things. We see the boundless empire of the seas, and upon that continually disputed territory the ships of England, from the proud *Temeraire* to the humblest fishing-bark that struggles against the tempest: all those little bits of England which are scattered over the blue, grey, or green immensity, battered by wind and wave, beneath the clouds and above the abyss; each of them a mere imperceptible point in space, but together forming a nation's greatness.

This subtle and obscure impression Turner gives us better than any one. He is the man of skies and waters, the man of the impalpable, the unfathomable, and the unstable; of that which cannot be impaired, cannot be delimited, cannot be exhausted, and can never be arrested. *Mobilis in mobile.* He has also painted the solid earth; but neither his trees, nor his buildings, nor his figures, nor his rocks impress us much. When he deals with things which the touch can resolve into their three dimensions he hesitates and comes to a standstill, he explains himself imperfectly, he stammers. We have to call in Constable, Collins, Callcott, Old Crome, even Gainsborough. His boat comes into collison with all manner of obstacles, as though in too narrow a harbour. But as soon as the horizon enlarges, when there is an extension of space, when the prospect widens—whether in height or in depth: then he spreads his wings; and this albatross, who walked so clumsily on the deck of a ship, darts forward, and skims across the liquid plains with a flight that no one since has succeeded in following.

All this is peculiar to Turner. With the Dutch masters a "marine painting" was in reality a sky; with Turner it is the water also. With the Dutchman the sky was a majestic composition of piled-up overhanging clouds, and the sea, much lower on the horizon, a marshalled army of very similar waves. Turner made the heavens open, and set the sea free. He surprised the secret of the waters' tireless interweaving. He saw there as many furrows as in a tilled field, as many reflections as in a mirror, as many colours as in the richest garden of the Riviera. Scarcely anywhere in his work is there the "colour of water." All is reflections, trembling curves, iridescence, foam and froth. He pleats the garment of water into infinitesimal folds (see his "*Sun of Venice*" *going to Sea*). Everything that he sets afloat takes on a phantom-like and airy appearance. The boats (look at his *Approach to Venice*) do not sink into the water, they scarcely touch it with their convex surface, like rose-petals fallen into a bowl of champagne, or like fairy slippers left forgotten upon the

flagstones of some Oriental palace. On the other hand, masts, pillars, columns, campanili, send down into the water long quivering reflections sparkling like a chaplet of rare and precious jewels.

The palaces which he builds on the water's brink participate in its uncertain and fantastic nature. We know the story of the American who having remarked that all the important personages at a diplomatic ball wore decorations, medals, &c., in their buttonholes or suspended round their necks, appeared in a drawing-room one evening decorated with a splendid order which no one recognised. A young *attaché* of the Embassy being emboldened to ask him what "order" this was: "So you like my star?" said the American, expanding his chest; "Well, it is my own invention!" Such are Turner's palaces, such are his towns, such are his harbours. He has evolved them all, more or less, out of his own consciousness: as with the famous *Port Ruysdael* which is not mentioned on any map. Thus it is that he suggests to us more than he has seen or can make us see.

It is by suggestion that he gives poetry and grandeur to the commonest and even the most ridiculous objects. What can there be more absurd than the Python in the *Garden of the Hesperides*, or the Polyphemus who rails at Ulysses? Yet what can be grander or more touching than Turner has made these pictures? This is because he has magnified his Polyphemus with all the grandeur of mystery: he has made him vague, half-imprisoned in the rock, uncertain as a figure of cloud. We are forced to imagine the giant, and he then becomes once more what he was to the apprehensive imaginations of antiquity.

In the same way Turner veils immensity in order to make it more strongly felt and desired. Look at his best works. Many are the obstacles which prevent us from seeing the horizon in completeness. This is an ingenious artifice to make us desire the more ardently to do so. The heart desires what flees and escapes from it. Let us recall our sensations on leaving a roadstead: we begin to move, there is another boat to avoid, that mole still to be got round, that point still to be doubled. We pass onward, we avoid the obstacles, we reach the point, we turn round . . . the horizon widens out. Joy! We are about to realise the vastness of the world. Here is the open sea, the open sky. We can see everything. We are going to see the whole world. . . . Alas! how small the world is! The days pass: the horizon becomes no wider. That sensation is only felt once: at the moment of issuing from the harbour. Remain in the harbour, O ardent and restless souls! Look at the ocean only across the hawsers, at the sky only between the masts! You will feel them grand, immense; for they will be enlarged by the whole extent of your yearning and desire, and there is nothing really infinite in the world except our desire. Prison-bars do more for the sublimity of heaven than the Creator himself; and Providence's greatest kindness to man is to have denied him wings and the right to destroy the poetry of the clouds. In his later years Turner one day cast prudence to the winds. He deter-

mined to go out to sea and paint the open sky. He was completely baffled. What had appeared infinite when caught only in glimpses became monotonous and shrunken. What had seemed inexhaustible was exhausted. By desiring to display itself to the full and without restraint, his dream had lost its far-away mysterious aspect. Through not being veiled by any reality his poetry had lost its grandeur. It is with Art as with Life. Picture to yourself the voyage around the world, around heaven, around the heart--but never make it !

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THE GRACES DECORATING A TERMINAL FIGURE OF HYMEN
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THE INFANT SAMUEL KNEELING AT PRAYER
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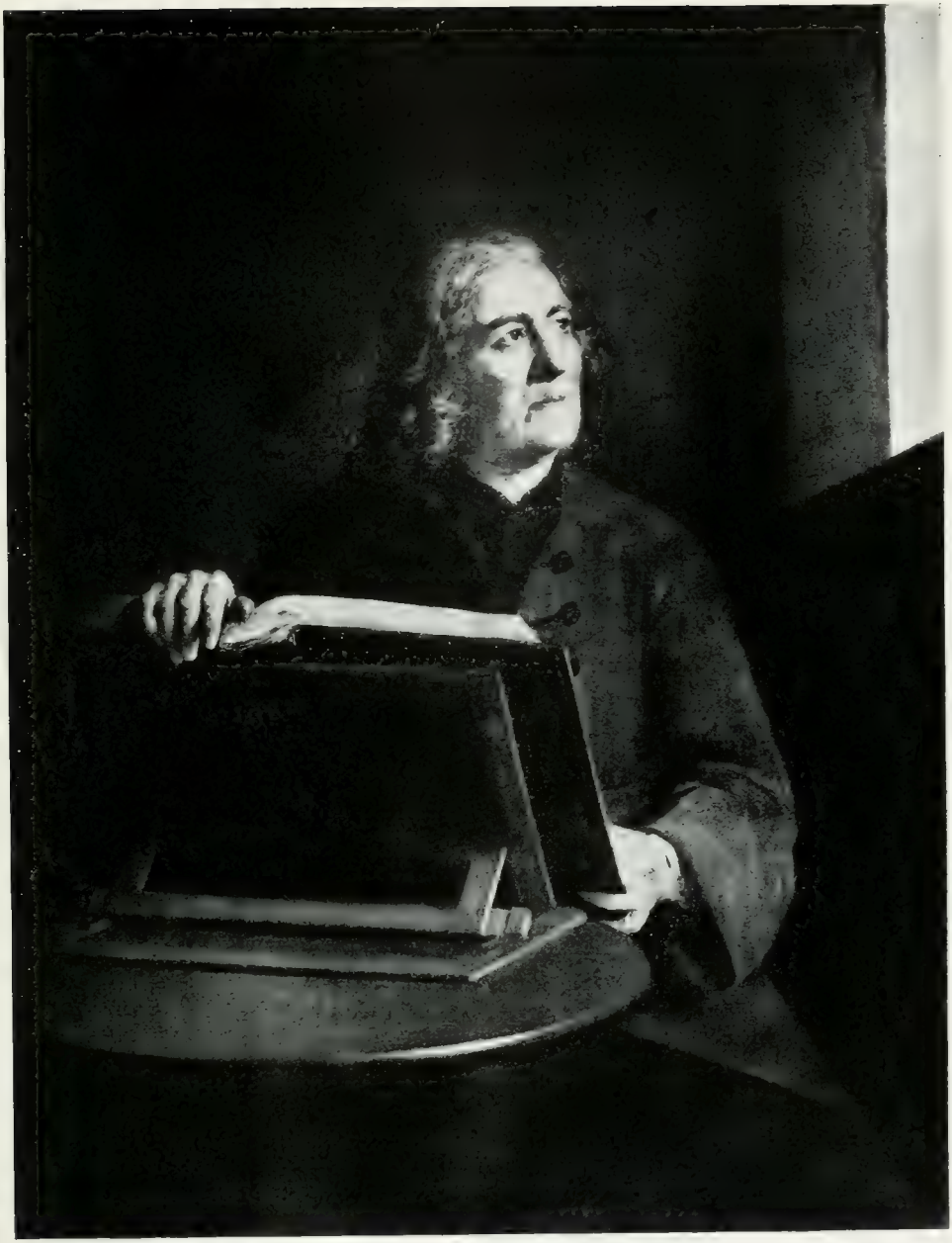

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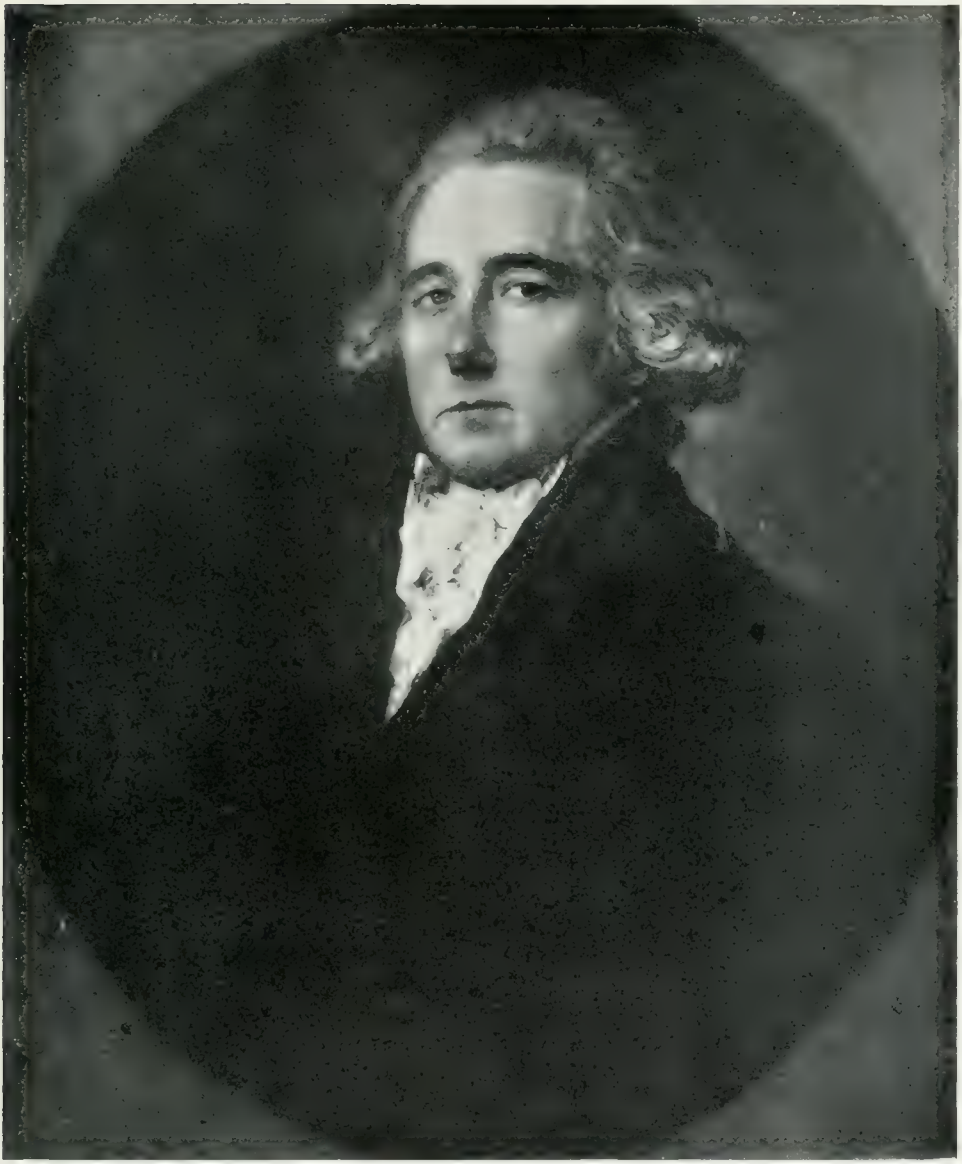

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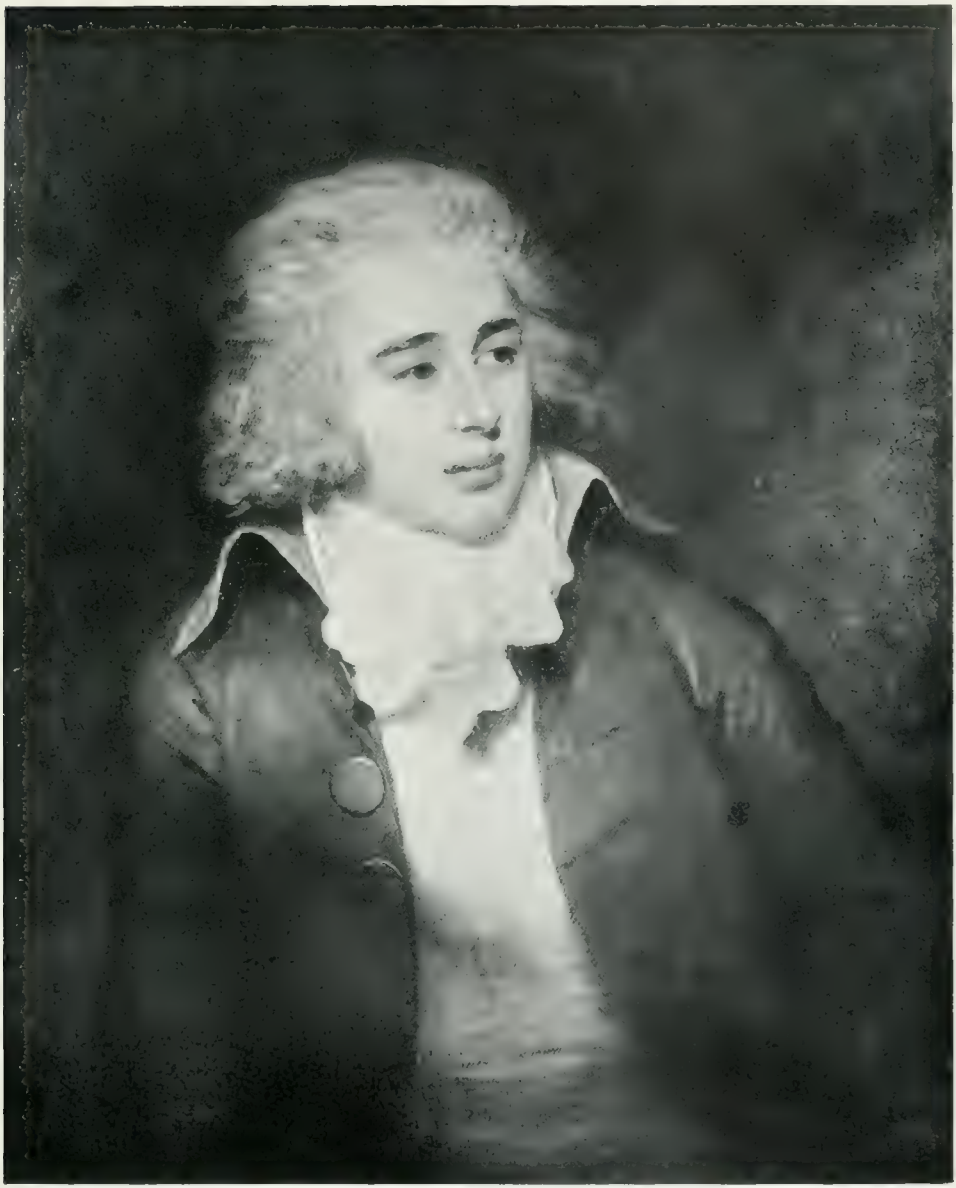

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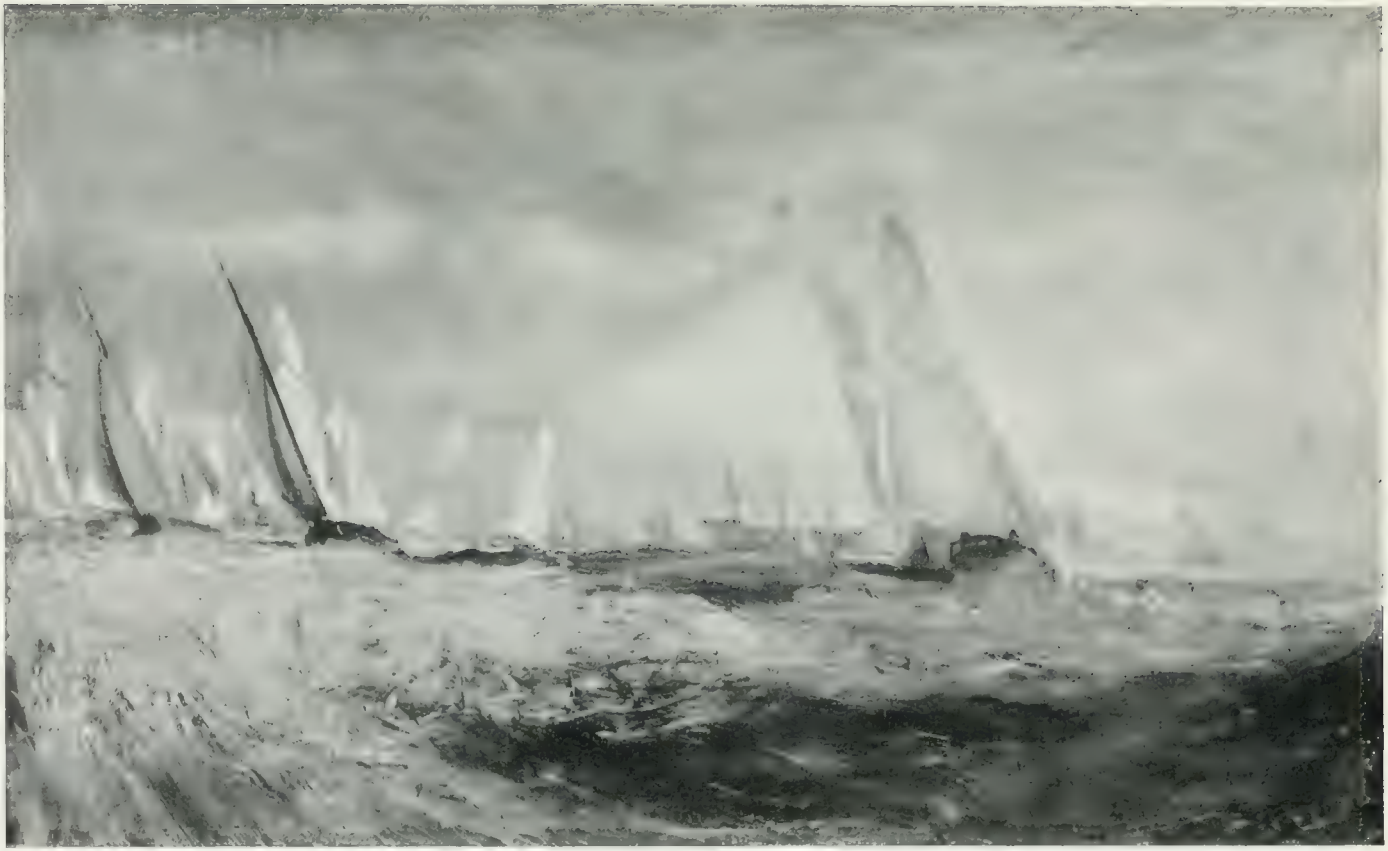

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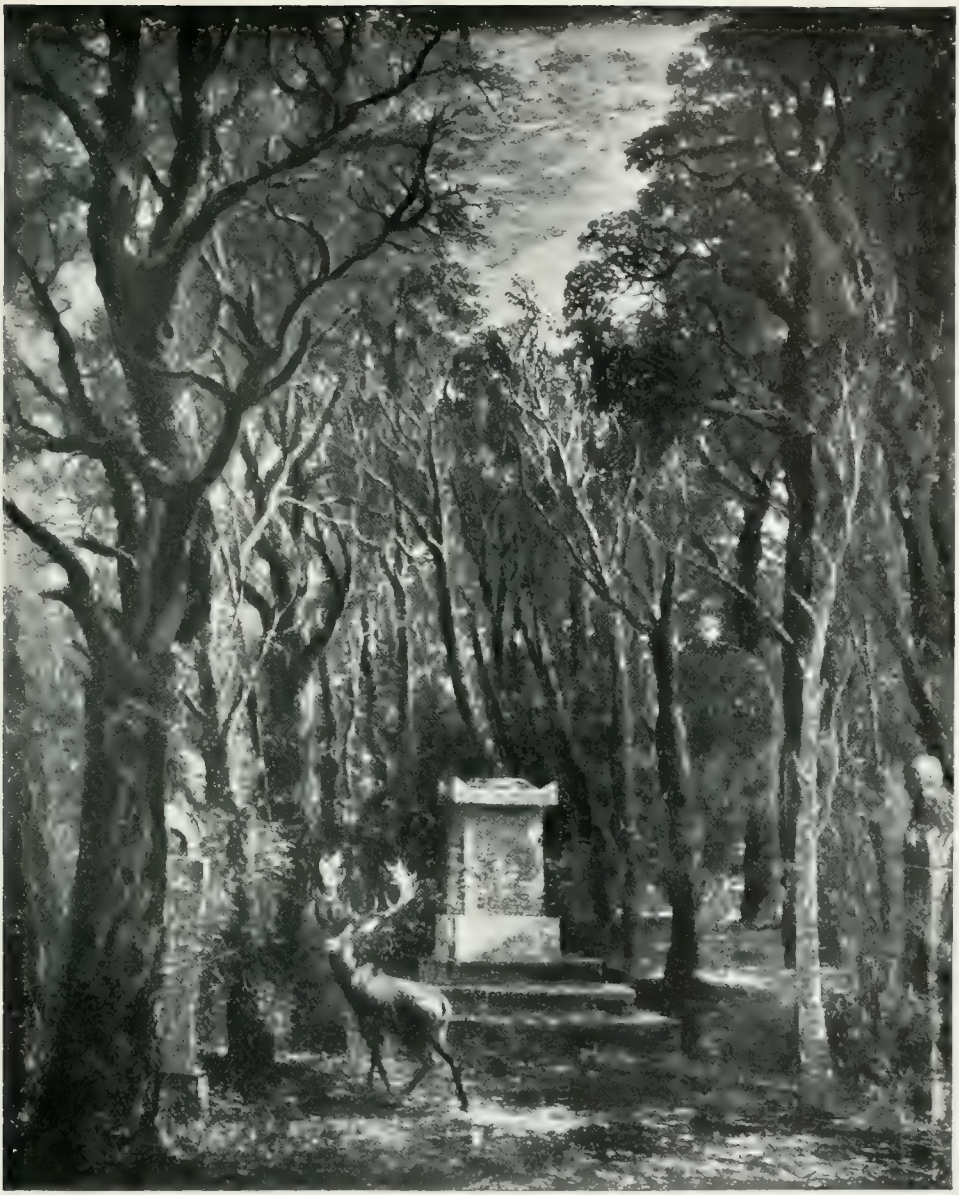

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